

## ROTATION PERIOD AND RECUPERATION TIME IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

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### INTRODUCTION

I am Major Rik Bergman. I work as a psychologist with the Behavioral Sciences Division of the Royal Netherlands Army.

Military behavioral scientists have become such a fixture in the Royal Netherlands Army since 1973, it is difficult to think of the army without them. 1973 was the year when the Military Psychological and Social Service was founded. At the moment this unit comprises approximately 50 officers, ranging in rank from first lieutenant to major general. These officers work in the following domains: selection, social scientific research, leadership training and skills, guidance and advice for organizational units, teaching, individual assistance, personnel care and management.

The Behavioral Sciences Division supports the objectives of the Royal Netherlands Army and the Royal Military Police by means of behavioral science research and advice. Besides initiating and carrying out psychological, sociological, educational and ergonomic research for personnel policy purposes and operational deployability, the division also has a monitoring function within the army and supports major projects. The division also supervises studies which have been subcontracted to external research agencies. The division employs a number of civilian behavioral scientists besides officers of the Military Psychological and Sociological Service.

For those of you who are interested, after my talk I have a brochure for you about the role of military behavioral scientists in the Royal Netherlands Army in English and in German.

### DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

I should now like to define the problem which is the subject of the research I shall be telling you about. The principle in the Royal Netherlands Army with regard to military operations is that personnel are deployed for six months, after which they are not deployed for a period of one year. After the year's "rest", military personnel can be deployed again. At the end of 1995 the Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Army gave orders for research to be conducted into whether this "deployment cycle" is too taxing for military personnel.

The researchers divided the question of whether the current deployment cycle was too taxing for personnel into two parts, namely *deployability* and *willingness to be deployed*.

*Deployability* is concerned with how long the minimum period of rest between two deployments should be if it is to be effective. This involves, for example, sufficient mental and physical recuperation time, adequate coping with psychological problems, etc. However, the duration of a period of rest is only one of the factors affecting effectiveness. Other factors which have an impact are the deployment situation (for example, the intensity and level of danger, and also the social situation, including circumstances at home during and after the deployment), individual features such as personality and experience, and the situation at work after deployment. Perhaps the amount of time people require to recover is closely dependent on other factors. Another point which is important

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for research into the effectiveness of the period of rest is the delay with which mental or physical problems may become manifest, sometimes lasting dozens of years. All this makes research into deployability extremely complex.

The *willingness to be deployed* of military personnel involves examining the question of the extent to which the current deployment cycle with a standard six-month deployment followed by a year's "rest" is acceptable to military personnel. The opinion of military personnel on indefinite contracts is primarily important here. The fact is that the deployment cycle in practice does not apply to personnel on a short-term contract. The latter, normally speaking, could only be deployed once during the term of their contract. By signing a follow-up contract or not they themselves can determine whether they will be deployed more than once.

Deployability and willingness to be deployed cannot be viewed separately. A serviceman may indicate that he wishes to be deployed again, while mentally or physically he is still not adequately deployable. And how important is it that a serviceman does not want to be deployed when the organization determines that he is suitable for deployment? Both these aspects therefore have to be examined.

### DEPLOYABILITY

To begin with I shall examine the research into deployability. First of all an attempt was made to find out whether other organizations have a deployment policy and whether they have conducted research into the suitability of military personnel for deployment. We contacted Medecins Sans Frontieres, as well as military behavioral scientists from the United States, Norway, Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Canada. It transpired that although most of these countries have a deployment policy, it is hardly ever based on the results of research into deployability.

A member of staff at Medecins Sans Frontieres said that they had not gone into the subject because they work with short contracts for each deployment. Deployed personnel decide for themselves how long and how often they wish to be deployed.

A colleague from the **United States** said that although twelve months is the rule for IFOR, normally speaking, the duration of deployment in the army was six months. For the US Air Force it is approximately four months and for the US Navy six months. Each time an endeavor is made to weigh the interests of the organization against the interests of personnel. However, there is no formal policy that provides for a minimum period of rest after deployment. Only in the US Navy is six months ashore guaranteed after operational deployment. No cohesive and systematic research has been carried out into the pressure of regular deployment in the US Army. The subject is being increasingly addressed by the army command and the government. There are signs that domestic violence and the divorce rate are clearly higher among soldiers who are regularly deployed. Moreover, many good young officers and NCOs leave the army because they do not want to risk losing their families. At the moment research is being carried out in the US into the relationship between the number of deployments and stress, health and adaptability.

**Norway** reported that the duration of deployment in the army for soldiers is six months. Officers are frequently deployed for a year. There is no minimum period of rest after deployment. It is the case that soldiers, after having been deployed for six months, can sign on for another term and thus remain in the deployment area for a longer period without any period of rest. No systematic research was being conducted into deployability.

**Germany** has only been taking part in peacekeeping operations in the last few years. For the Germans there has not yet been any need to develop a policy on a deployment cycle, nor have they carried out any research into deployability.

A **British** colleague related that it is army policy for military personnel to be deployed for a maximum of six months if servicemen cannot be accompanied by their families. An occasional exception to this is possible. An endeavor is made to adhere to a minimum period of rest of two years after a deployment. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain with the growing number of missions. No research has been started into this problem.

The **Belgian** army reported that it adheres to a deployment period of four months. This used to be six months but was reduced for social reasons. A period of rest of twelve months applies. The problems surrounding deployment have not been systematically catalogued. Exploratory research has resulted in the pinpointing of a number of risk groups.

A **Canadian** colleague indicated that the duration of deployment depended on the mission. If servicemen are unable to be accompanied by their families, the minimum period of rest after deployment is one year. A period of three years, however, is aimed at. Our Canadian colleague did not report any research.

Clearly, research into the repercussions of regular deployment on the deployability of military personnel is desperately needed. This was why the Behavioral Sciences Division, in conjunction with the Individual Assistance Division, has meanwhile started conducting research on this subject. The main outlines of the research are as follows.

In late 1995 an Aftercare Pilot Study was implemented in the Royal Netherlands Army. The pilot study aimed at ascertaining whether an active approach (distributing an Aftercare Questionnaire) was a suitable way of spotting which servicemen did and which did not need to be offered help. The pilot study sought to ascertain how the questionnaire was experienced and what the pros and cons were of this approach. The pilot study was also intended to give an indication of the capacity required, in terms of human and other resources, to be able to approach all military personnel who had taken part in UN missions since 1990 and who will take part in the future. It was found that the questionnaire was a suitable model for spotting whether a serviceman was suffering such psychological and/or psycho-social problems as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Moreover, filling in the questionnaire functioned as a kind of self-debriefing and the active approach was perceived as positive by the respondents.

Once the Aftercare Pilot Study had been finished, it was decided that all military personnel who had been deployed since 1990 and are being deployed would be given the questionnaire to fill in within a year of their return. This means that now and in the future a wealth of information is being gathered on all deployed military personnel.

It was possible to use the information from the Aftercare Questionnaire to link individual information, for instance, on past history of deployment, rest periods between deployments, and the circumstances prior to, during and after deployment, to the development of psychological and/or psycho-social problems, and to map out any correlations. The first report is expected to be completed halfway through next year, so that we will be able to tell you more about this at the next IMTA conference. What's more, in the longer term we will have substantial numbers of military personnel who have been deployed on several occasions and thus have filled in the Aftercare Questionnaire several times. Hence, there is the prospect of results based on longitudinal research. For those who are interested, after my talk I will have a number of copies of the reports on the Aftercare Pilot Study in the Royal Netherlands Army available in English.

#### WILLINGNESS TO BE DEPLOYED

That brings me now to research into the willingness to be deployed. The research was intended to answer the following three questions:

- Firstly: to what extent do regular military personnel on indefinite contracts and their "home front" think the current deployment cycle is acceptable based on the principle of six months deployment followed by a year's rest?
- Secondly: what reasons for the acceptability of the current deployment cycle do regulars on indefinite contracts and their home front give?
- And lastly: how many regulars on indefinite contracts are intending to look for a job outside the army because of the current deployment cycle?

A brief written questionnaire was administered to regulars on indefinite contracts. The questions of acceptability and the reasons for this were put as open questions. This enabled respondents to give their opinion without being influenced by fixed-reply options. The answers were then inventoried, interpreted, and coded. The respondents

were also asked their sex, age, unit, rank, family circumstances, and deployment experience. The respondents were asked to fill in the list with their partner. The questionnaires were sent to the respondents' home address.

A research sample was chosen that comprised 293 military personnel who had been deployed more than once in addition to a representative sample of 212 military personnel. The response rate was 60%. 77% of the respondents had been deployed once or more than once. 27% of this group had not volunteered for deployment on any occasion, 35% had volunteered in half of the cases and 29% had volunteered for each deployment.

**The first question concerned the extent to which military personnel and their home front consider the present deployment cycle acceptable, based on the principle of a six-month deployment followed by a year's rest.**

- Acceptable: 26%

Acceptable provided: 17 % (provided it applies to everyone, provided exceptions are possible, and provided that there are a maximum number of deployments over a certain period)

- Neutral: 2%
- Unacceptable: 49%
- Acceptable for military personnel but unacceptable for partner: 6%

It emerges from the analysis that the military personnel who had volunteered or who had a positive/neutral stance toward deployment consider the current deployment cycle more acceptable than do military personnel who regarded their designation for deployment as negative.

Military personnel who have a partner tend to volunteer for deployment less often than military personnel without a partner. 52% of the military personnel with partners think that the current cycle is unacceptable, as opposed to 32% of the military personnel without a partner. Whether the partner has or does not have a job does not play a role.

Military personnel with children think that the deployment cycle is less acceptable the younger their children are. Once the children have reached secondary school age, their opinion no longer seems to differ from that of respondents without children.

Respondents who have been deployed on an individual basis think the cycle is more acceptable than those deployed in a unit. Perhaps the military personnel deployed on an individual basis are usually volunteers and are more inclined to consider the cycle acceptable anyway. This could not be statistically verified because of the small sample.

There are significant differences in the opinions of military personnel depending on the arm and branch. The age, sex and rank of the respondents play no demonstrable role in their opinion.

It was found that deployment experience (or lack of it) played no role in the judgment of the current cycle. Nor does the opinion of respondents with actual experience of the current deployment cycle deviate from the opinion of the respondents without such experience. The fact that only 19% of the respondents were negative about their deployment on one or several occasions perhaps has an impact here.

It should be pointed out that the sample is not entirely representative. For one thing, we worked with a file of military personnel who had been deployed on several occasions. On the basis of the research findings, however, we expect no major differences if all regular personnel on indefinite contracts are asked for their opinion of the current deployment cycle.

**The second question concerned the reasons given by military personnel and their home front for their opinion on the acceptability of the current deployment cycle.**

The 256 respondents gave 31 different reasons for their opinion as to the acceptability of the current deployment cycle. Those reasons cited most frequently are listed here:

- 33% An overly heavy burden on the family.
- 16% Acceptable provided everybody is deployed.
- 16% The actual period of rest is less than one year because of the training and preparation for deployment
- 12% Deployments are at the expense of "normal" performance of the job
- 10% Loyalty: you are a serviceman, so you have to go.
- 9% The cycle is (psychologically) too demanding for military personnel.
- 6% Acceptable provided there are a maximum number of deployments over a certain period. For example two deployments in succession but several years of rest subsequently.
- 5% Acceptability depends on the type of deployment and personal circumstances.
- 5% Someone should be able to be deployed at his own request more often than once every one and a half years.
- 5% Too demanding for social life (for example clubs, acquaintances and friends).

**The last question concerned how many military personnel were planning to look for a job outside the army because of the present deployment cycle.**

- Looking for a job outside the army: 9%
- Not looking for a job outside the army: 87%
- Don't know: 4%

### CONCLUSION

That brings me to the end of my presentation. The key question was whether the current deployment cycle of the Royal Netherlands Army, based on the principle of a six-month deployment followed by a year's rest, is too taxing for military personnel. I have explained to you that this question really has two sides, namely deployability and willingness to be deployed. I have indicated that the armies of diverse countries, like the Netherlands Army, do have a formal or informal policy on the duration of deployment and periods of rest, but there are virtually no results of systematic research on which this policy is based.

At the beginning of this year, research into the relationship between the rest period and deployability was begun. The first results are expected by mid-1997. The research into willingness to be deployed has already been concluded, answering the question concerning the extent to which Dutch military personnel and their home front find the current deployment cycle acceptable, and listing the reasons they gave for their views.

Thank you for listening.



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